

HINAYANA BUDDHISM AND FAMILY PLANNING IN CEYLON

Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion of a large region in South Asia throughout which a rapid rise in the rate of natural increase is either actual or potential. Since institutional factors condition the receptivity of peoples to family planning ideas and programs, it is pertinent to inquire into the relationship between Hinayana ideology and controlled fertility. The present report deals briefly with the logical pertinence of certain Buddhist concepts to different aspects of family planning, and more extensively with the results of a survey conducted among Ceylonese Buddhist priests relating to their attitudes and interpretations on these issues.

Although the ideas of ahimsa (non-killing) and rebirth are pertinent to the matter of contraception, there is no logically necessary antagonism between them. Most of the priests interviewed had never considered the issues here raised and no doctrinaire positions have been established by religious leaders. Spontaneous responses indicated sharp differences between priests having differing amounts of education. Practically all of the highly educated saw no inconsistency between Buddhist ideology and contraception and family planning programs. The majority of the poorly educated felt that Buddhism stood in opposition to such practices. Generally, however, the latter showed more disinterest in the issue than active opposition on religious grounds. There is no tendency to view unlimited fertility as spiritually meritorious.

It is concluded that while many Ceylon priests might take a passive attitude toward a family planning program, active opposition would be slight. Whatever ideological opposition might arise would rest more upon a folk basis than upon a religiously ideological one. Among intellectuals some positive support for family planning programs might be expected.

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Preliminary Abstract*

DEMOGRAPHIC GLIMPSES INTO BURMA

After about 125 years of colonialism, as part of the British Empire, Burma became a completely independent country in 1948. Slightly smaller than Texas, she had an estimated population of 18.5 million in 1952. Unlike most of her Asiatic neighbors she is resource rich, especially in respect to food.

Geographically isolated by ranges of hills and mountains on the strategic peninsula of Southeastern Asia, the Burmese population is predominantly of Mongolian stock with an Indo-Buddhist culture. Burma is characterized by a great diversity of racial and ethnic groupings and a wide range of economic and social organization, varying from that of nomadic hill tribes with traditions of head-hunting to metropolitan urban existence. Like most of Southeastern Asia, colonialism has left her with a pluralistic society, and with relatively large exogenous population groups, Indians -- including both Hindu and Muslim, and Chinese.

Burma has yet to experience the impact of the demographic revolution. Her birth and death rates, while not precisely known, are undoubtedly close to the highest levels on the globe. She has no problem of population pressure, however, and is, on the whole, unaware of a population problem.

The Government of the Union of Burma is committed to a policy of induced economic and social development and lays great importance on decreasing mortality and improving the health of the population. Burma has requested and received technical assistance for economic and social development from the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies, from the unilateral programs of the United States and from the Colombo Plan; and in addition she has undertaken development programs on her own initiative with the assistance of expert personnel which she has employed directly from abroad. A number of her development programs are expressly aimed at the reduction of mortality and the improvement of health, but she has as yet taken no official position or action in respect to the control of fertility, nor has she had occasion to do so. Although there are no legal or religious barriers to the control of fertility, the central role of the large family in her culture and the prominent place of children in her value system are likely to constitute serious barriers to the control of population growth in the coming years. There is some evidence of practices of family limitation among Burma's upper and more Westernized population groups.

The Government of the Union of Burma is actively engaged in national planning and has created a Ministry of National Planning and a Social and Economic Board, Chairmanned by the Prime Minister, as agencies to spearhead social and

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economic development. As an important adjunct of national planning, she has created a Central Statistical Office and a Census Office which is now engaged in the conduct of the first Censuses of Independent Burma. Pre-test Census operations, conducted in 1952, indicated that census-taking in Burma could be as comprehensive and as reliable as in the more advanced nations.** The Censuses, as a result of internal disorder, are being conducted in a series of stages so that complete results may not be expected for several years. But the Census statistics will provide a demographic benchmark against which to measure the changes which may be anticipated from Burma's efforts to obtain higher economic development and to advance the welfare of her people.

Preliminary sample tabulations, from the pre-test Census data collected in 1952, provide some glimpses into the population structure and dynamics of some cities and towns in Burma. While Burma is predominantly rural, it is likely that, with the exception of Rangoon and two or three other large cities, urban-rural differences will be relatively small. The following data are presented, in comparison with U.S. statistics, more to demonstrate the potentialities of the Population Census of Burma, now in process, than to provide substantive information about Burma at this time. The Burmese data are based on two small probability samples of about 1,500 persons from 4 towns and about 2,800 persons from 28 towns. These and other data are discussed in the paper to be presented.

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**See October, 1953 issue of Population Index, "Current Items"; and forthcoming report Development of Statistics in Burma, 1951-1952, United Nations, Technical Assistance Administration.

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Selected Preliminary Data from Pre-Test Population Census of Burma, March, 1952
(4 town sample of about 1,500 persons)

	Burma	United States**	
	1952	1950	1940
1. Median age-- total population	22.9	30.2	29.0
2. Male	23.8	29.9	29.1
3. Female	22.3	30.5	29.0
4. Percentage of population 65 years and older	2.8	8.2	6.8
5. Male	2.8	7.7	6.7
6. Female	2.8	8.5	7.0
7. Persons under 15 and 65 and over per 100 persons 15-64	49.5	53.9	46.8
8. Persons under 15 per 100 persons 15-64	45.4	41.3	36.8
9. Persons 65 and over per 100 persons 15-64	4.1	12.5	10.1
10. Percent of persons 14 and older married	*	^a	
11. Crude percent--total	59.1	68.1	59.6
12. Male	61.6	69.9	59.7
13. Female	56.7	66.5	59.5
14. Standardized for age ^b --total	59.1	63.8	56.1
15. Male	60.3	62.0	54.1
16. Female	57.9	65.3	58.2
17. Women ever married			
18. Median age at marriage	18.2	21.2	21.7
19. Median age at birth first child	20.2		
20. Average duration of marriage--crude	16.0	-	17.5
21. Average duration of marriage--standardized for age ^a	16.0	-	15.5
22. Children ever born per 1000 women ever married	3347	2381	1961
23. Children ever born per 1000 mothers	4143	3006	2610
24. Children under 5 per 1000 women 15-44	424	473	329
25. Women 50 and older ever married			
26. Children ever born per 1000 women	5493	-	3274 ^c
27. Married under age 20	5980	-	4781 ^d
28. Married at age 20 or older	4111	-	2769 ^d
29. Children ever born per 1000 mothers	6113	-	3875 ^c
30. Married under age 20	6354	-	5053 ^d
31. Married at age 20 or older	5286	-	3411 ^d
32. Percent childless	10.1	-	15.7 ^c
33. Percent of children ever born to women ever married, alive 1952	58.9	-	-
34. Total annual income of persons 10 years and older			
35. Median income in rupees (4.75 Rs. = 1 dollar)	376	-	-
36. Percent under Rs. 100	16	-	-
37. Percent under Rs. 500	59	-	-
38. Percent under Rs. 1000	79	-	-

*Data from 28 town sample of about 2800 persons.

**Data from 16th and 17th Censuses of the United States, unless otherwise noted.

^aU.S. data are for 1951. Source: Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics, Series P-20, No. 38, April, 1952.

^bAge structure of Burmese population used as standard.

^cData for native-white women 50-74 years old ever married.

^dData for native-white women 50-74 years old married once, husband present.